

Context and Implications Document for: Supporting practitioner-led inquiry into classroom dialogue with a research-informed professional learning resource: A design- based approach

Sara Hennessy¹ | Ruth Kershner¹ | Elisa Calcagni² |
Farah Ahmed¹

¹University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK

²Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Jena, Germany

Correspondence

Sara Hennessy, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK.

Email: sch30@cam.ac.uk

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Authors' Introduction

Active participation by students in classroom dialogue is increasingly linked to learning outcomes on a range of measures including standardised tests of subject content knowledge. It also promotes mutual understanding and respect for others' knowledge and views. However, dialogue is rarely observed in classrooms around the world. There is a need to develop awareness and practice in educators and students.

In our study, 74 practitioners across all educational levels and located in seven countries used the evidence-informed Teacher Scheme for Educational Dialogue Analysis (T-SEDA) resource pack to support their own inquiries, systematically analysing classroom dialogue and reflecting critically on the outcomes. The success of this model in developing new dialogic practices is linked to the pivotal role that local research leaders and facilitators played. They carved their roles according to the characteristics and needs of their institutions, supporting colleagues to develop understanding of dialogic pedagogy and to adapt the non-prescriptive resources to their own purposes, needs and diverse contexts.

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Although the importance of research in teacher professional development is well understood, the value of a dialogic exchange between teachers and researchers has been demonstrated by the T-SEDA project. An iterative, collaborative process of designing the pack and the approach meant that research knowledge about the value and promotion of dialogue was mobilised and jointly constructed between researchers, facilitators and practitioners. Inquiry materials, case stories, outcomes and insights, along with emerging academic research findings, are continually incorporated into pack updates so the resource is a 'living' form of knowledge exchange. The outcomes were very promising in terms of pointing to a low-cost, scalable and sustainable approach to teacher learning in this area.

Implications for Policy

An established tradition of 'What Works' style approaches is based on a belief that policy mandates are the main drivers for educational change. Gorard *et al.* (2020) argue that the use of evidence could be enforced, perhaps by being built into the curriculum or by law. This approach, however, necessitates a strong consensus around the 'best available evidence', which risks rapidly becoming outdated and which does not always take sufficient account of contextual variation. The growing body of research converging on the dialogic teaching strategies that are proving powerful for learning offers some guidance on how such strategies can be integrated at a general level of curriculum and overall pedagogy.

However, diverse settings require context-specific approaches to be effective. A semi-structured professional inquiry approach enabling practitioners to harness the existing dialogic research findings can facilitate local implementation. We argue that the 'best available evidence' is actually generated when practitioners conduct their own local systematic inquiries informed by rigorous research evidence that is made accessible for their use. The T-SEDA programme supports practitioners in locally contextualising and further adapting the approach through testing its applicability and boundaries in their own teaching settings. Therefore, enshrining opportunities, protected time and facilitator support for such inquiries into institutional and regional structures, as opposed to prescribing their content, would be an effective policy. Some countries have already mandated extensive, timetabled opportunities for teacher professional development (e.g., the Netherlands, Singapore, South Korea, Sweden) or lesson study (China, Japan) and this approach would benefit other countries. Moreover, encouraging collaboration with academic researchers enables a more dialogic model of researcher-practitioner knowledge exchange that benefits all parties. It potentially leads to wider consolidation and dissemination of useful approaches, improving the evidence base.

Recommendations for national and institutional policy makers:

1. Integrate dialogic pedagogy into official curriculum guidance.
2. Provide protected time and opportunities for collaborative practitioner inquiry and researcher-practitioner exchange, with further external support and feedback from school networks and inspection agencies.
3. Endorse use of T-SEDA and similar practical tools.
4. Offer professional development and guidance to support local facilitators who can lead their colleagues in generating collaborative dialogic professional inquiry.

Implications for Practice

1. Local facilitation of school-based inquiry

Our model of educational change is based on developing professional learning communities with a strong sense of collective responsibility for student outcomes. This is very likely to be undermined, however, in contexts where reluctant teachers are forced to participate. Instead, we hope that supporting teachers' agency in their inquiries will increase buy-in. Our study shows that understanding of the benefits of learner participation in classroom dialogues and a considerable degree of autonomy are motivating factors in conducting inquiry into existing practice and in incorporating new dialogic practices, along with the all-important support from a local facilitator with some form of leadership responsibility for professional development or research. While solo practitioners can use T-SEDA, the most powerful model is one of interaction and collaboration with peers in developing, trialling, critiquing and reflecting on new approaches.

2. Understanding the power of dialogic pedagogy across diverse educational contexts

Classroom dialogue involves participants exploring, building on and engaging critically and respectfully with others' ideas, practising open-mindedness, and making reasoning explicit. Our study and others show that dialogic teaching applies across a wide variety of settings, curricula and subject areas and it can benefit students of all ages from pre-school to higher education. Developing awareness of the power of the approach and ability to apply it in different contexts requires explicit information about dialogue alongside sufficient flexibility within the approach and underpinning materials. It also requires recognition of the T-SEDA approach as distinctive and feasible to use in practice, especially when schools are deluged with competing policy-driven advice and resources. Integrating T-SEDA into pre-service as well as in-service education would assist here and it responds to the call by Gorard *et al.* (2020) for teacher education to be evidence-led and evidence-relevant.

3. Guidance and resources to support close analysis of dialogue

Practitioners develop their own impressions and assumptions about teaching and learning interactions in their classrooms, but these are often challenged when *systematic* analysis takes place; for example, it often reveals a higher proportion of teacher monologue and lower levels of participation by some students than expected. Enormous benefits can be derived through first characterising existing practice using the self-audit tool in the T-SEDA pack and using the range of systematic observation, coding and rating tools provided to chart detailed changes in dialogic interactions over time.

Recommendations:

1. Support local facilitation of school-based inquiry conducted by groups of practitioners through conducive organisational structures and dedicated time for participation by practitioners themselves and peer facilitators.
2. Embed the T-SEDA practical tools supporting dialogic pedagogy into pre-service teacher education and make them widely available to in-service teachers at all educational levels and across subject areas.
3. Encourage practitioners to invest the time to conduct systematic inquiries into their practice using the range of dedicated analytic tools in the T-SEDA pack and to share findings and subsequent actions with colleagues.

Resources for Teaching & Learning in Higher Education

Author recommends

Gorard, S., See, B.H. and Siddiqui, N. (2020) What is the evidence on the best way to get evidence into use in education? *Review of Education*, 8(2), 570–610.

Mercer, N., Wegerif, R. & Major, L. (Eds.) (2020) *International handbook of research on dialogic education*. London: Routledge.

Hennessey, S., Warwick, P., Brown, L., Rawlins, D. and Neale, C. (Eds.) (2014) *Developing interactive teaching and learning using the IWB*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Kershner, R., Hennessey, S., Dowdall, K., Owen, H. & Calcagni, M.E. (2020) Teachers as 'natural experimenters': Using T-SEDA to develop classroom dialogue. In L. Rolls and E. Hargreaves (Eds.) *Reimagining professional development in schools* (Chapter 8). Abingdon: Routledge.

Kershner, R., Hennessey, S., Wegerif, R. & Ahmed, A. (2020) *Research methods for educational dialogue*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Mercer, N., Hennessey, S. & Warwick, P. (2019) Dialogue, thinking together and digital technology in the classroom: Some educational implications of a continuing line of inquiry. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 97, 187–199.

Robinson, V., Hohepa, M., & Lloyd, C. (2009). *School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why best evidence synthesis*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Useful links

Resources for dialogic inquiry

Teacher-SEDA webpage with downloadable pack and resources: <https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/programmes/tseda/>

Cambridge Educational Dialogue Community Hub for practitioners and researchers (<https://www.edudialogue.org/>)

MOOC for T-SEDA facilitators, teachers and practitioners: <https://mbrugha.github.io/courses-in-a-box/>

ED:TALK— Evidence and Dialogue Toolkit for Teachers: <http://edtoolkit.educ.cam.ac.uk/>

Lesson Study—A website to support teachers to collaboratively study their own practice: <https://lessonstudy.co.uk/>

Video resources

Series of short videos introducing educational dialogue and T-SEDA: <https://www.edudialogue.org/resources/introductory-video-series/>

Cambridge Education Dialogue Research (CEDiR) group— Resource bank of lesson videos: <https://sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/2827689>

Websites with practical resources for educational dialogue

Thinking Together: <https://thinkingtogether.educ.cam.ac.uk>

Oracy Cambridge: <https://oracycambridge.org>

Dialogic Teaching: <https://robinaalexander.org.uk/dialogic-teaching/>

Exploratory Talk: <https://thinkingtogether.educ.cam.ac.uk/resources/>

Accountable Talk: <https://www.theteachertoolkit.com/index.php/tool/accountable-discussions>

Podcast

Podcast by Neil Mercer, Balancing Teacher and Learner Talk: <https://www.tes.com/news/how-much-your-lesson-should-be-teacher-talk>

Focus questions

For practitioners conducting inquiries:

- In what ways is my existing practice dialogic?
- In what ways might my practice become more dialogic?
- How can I use research to improve my practice?
- How can I use a professional inquiry to improve my practice?
- How would you adapt the resources from the T-SEDA pack to your setting?

For facilitators of professional inquiry:

- What facilitation model do you think could work well in your setting? What needs to be in place for this to work?
- How can you maximise the synergy with your institutional goals and agendas? What links can be made between existing projects and T-SEDA inquiries into dialogic practice?
- What do you think will be the biggest challenges to secure buy-in in your setting?
- What levels of scaffolding are needed to support your colleagues at different stages of their inquiries?
- What support can you provide when teachers are formulating their inquiry foci and questions?
- How can you ensure that teachers don't lose momentum when conducting a reflective inquiry into their practice?

Seminar/project idea

- Practitioner inquirers: To present their own inquiry cycle, methods and findings and gain feedback from peers. This applies to graduate students who are doing any form of teaching as well as practitioners in any educational setting.
- Facilitators: For those who have facilitated a group of teacher inquiries in one or more settings, to present their facilitation plan and their reflections on its successes and areas for improvement, and solicit peer feedback.

Sample syllabus

TITLE: **Educational dialogue—A course for facilitators**¹

Week 1: The role of the facilitator

Week 2: Revisiting the theories and impact of educational dialogue

- Week 3: Self-audits and reflective inquiry
- Week 4: Identifying key dialogic features in the classroom
- Week 5: Conducting an inquiry
- Week 6: Continuing the role of facilitator and your inquiries

Readings

O'Connor, C. & Michaels, S. (2019) Supporting teachers in taking up productive talk moves: The long road to professional learning at scale. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 97, 166–175. Accessible from: <https://educacion.udd.cl/files/2018/04/Conceptualizing-Talk-Moves-as-Tools.pdf>

A Teacher's Guide to Dialogic Pedagogy Part 1: The What and the Why: This is a series of posts where Neil Phillipson explores 'what dialogic pedagogy is, why it might be valuable and how a classroom teacher or school might get started with it'. See the reading list at the bottom of the page as well; these are useful for further reflection.

Knight, S. (2014) Creating a supportive environment for classroom dialogue. In S. Hennessy, P. Warwick, N. Mercer, L. Brown, D. Rawlins & C. Neale (Eds.) *Developing interactive teaching and learning using the IWB: Teacher resource*. Maidenhead: Open University Press. <http://oro.open.ac.uk/36484/>

END NOTE

- ¹ The structure of this suggested course and some of the prompts in this section have been taken from a MOOC designed by Meaghan Brugh.

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